

Chapter 11

Recreation

This chapter describes the impacts of the proposed project on existing federal, state, and local recreational facilities in the general vicinity of the Upper and Lower Sites. More detailed information and additional discussion can be found in Appendix J, Recreation Technical Report. In addition, Appendix H, the Land Use Technical Report, contains a discussion of various recreation plans, including the National Scenic Byways Program, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Washington Winter Recreation Program, and Washington State Trails Plan.

11.1 Existing Conditions

The general Upper Snoqualmie Valley area offers year-round opportunities for hiking and climbing, bicycling, camping, fishing, picnicking, equestrian activities, river access and boating, and experiencing panoramic views and historic sites (including a railroad tour). During winter, backcountry skiing, resort skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling are also available. Table 1 of Appendix J lists existing recreational facilities in the vicinity of the proposed project (generally within a 5-mile radius). Figure 11-1 illustrates the primary federal and state recreational areas in the vicinity.

The Upper and Lower Sites are owned by the Weyerhaeuser Company and have been managed for timber production and mineral extraction. A system of forest roads was developed on the property for timber harvest activity and is gated to discourage public access. No recreational uses are authorized on either of the sites, although some unauthorized hiking, hunting, and shooting occurs.

11.1.1 Recreational Features in the Vicinity

The Upper Snoqualmie Valley provides accessible and extensive outdoor park, recreation, and open space opportunities. The North Bend area is a major rest stop for Puget Sound residents and tourists traveling the Interstate 90 (I-90) corridor to recreational sites in the area. Recreational uses in the Upper Snoqualmie Valley include hiking and climbing, biking, camping, water sports, skiing, hunting, and fishing.

The primary recreational facilities in the vicinity of Grouse Ridge are managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, Washington State Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), King County, and City of North Bend. Below is a brief discussion of the public facilities in the area (by jurisdiction), and the level of recreational use at each area, if available. The Recreation Technical Report, Appendix J, includes

more detailed descriptions of public and private recreational amenities and locations in the project vicinity.

11.1.1.1 U.S. Forest Service

The Mount Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest and Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area are east of the Lower and Upper Sites. The Denny Creek and Tinkham campgrounds, 18 miles and 11 miles east of North Bend, respectively, do not have existing views of either the Upper or Lower Site. Trails in the National Forest and Wilderness Area that have the potential for some distant views of the sites are the Mount Defiance/Mason Lake Trail (No. 1038), Mount Defiance Trail (No. 1009), the Thompson Lake Trail (No. 1009.01), McClellan Butte Trail (No. 1015), and the Granite Mountain Trail (No. 1016).

As of 1994, total use of the former North Bend Ranger District was estimated at 3.7 million annual recreation visitor days (RVD), according to the U.S. Forest Service. (RVD is a 12-hour unit of time spent in a particular activity.) The North Bend and Enumclaw Ranger Districts have merged to form the Snoqualmie Ranger District. The most popular trails (according to 2000 data) are the Mount Defiance/Mason Lake and McClellan Butte Trails. Approximately 3,500 people per year hike to Mason Lake (from the trailhead off of I-90, Exit 42), and 2,500 of these visitors continue to the summit of Mount Defiance. McClellan Butte Trail (also accessed from Exit 42) is the most popular, with 10,000 people hiking the trail annually. There were approximately 15,877 visits to Denny Creek campground and 9,514 visits to Tinkham campground in 2000.

11.1.1.2 State of Washington

Olallie State Park and the Twin Falls Natural Area are both south of the project sites (and I-90) and accessed by Homestead Valley Road. The Twin Falls Natural Area includes a trail system that gains elevation on the north face of Cedar Butte and has potential for limited views to the lower elevations of Grouse Ridge. North of I-90, the Mount Si Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) has approximately 7 miles of trails along the southern face of Mount Si and Little Si. The Mount Si trails and summit area (including Haystack Meadow) afford panoramic views of the Upper Snoqualmie Valley that encompass the Lower and Upper Sites. The Iron Horse State Park/John Wayne Trail traverses the southern I-90 corridor from North Bend to Thorp, crossing the north faces of Cedar Butte and McClellan Butte and leading over Snoqualmie Pass. The Mailbox Peak and Granite Lakes trails begin at the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River (near the end of Lake Dorothy Road) and ascend to high elevations. The Mount Washington trail (to the south of and above Olallie State Park) also provides views of the project sites.

In 2000, an estimated 250,000 people visited Olallie State Park, approximately 72,000 people visited Mount Si, approximately 6,700

people visited Little Si, nearly 200,000 people visited Iron Horse State Park/John Wayne Trail, and an estimated 3,500 people used the Mailbox Peak trailhead, according to state officials. No other recreational use or visitation records are available for state facilities. However, the available data suggest that greater than 500,000 people visit state recreational facilities in the vicinity of the proposed project. General demand for State Parks and Department of Natural Resources winter recreation facilities in the area is described in Appendix J.

11.1.1.3 King County

The Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area (co-managed with Seattle Public Utilities) and the Snoqualmie Valley Trail, are the major County recreation areas in the vicinity of the proposed project sites. Both areas include trails that provide views of the Snoqualmie River Valley and the Upper and Lower Sites, primarily from Rattlesnake Ledge and the Snoqualmie Valley Trail as it descends toward North Bend. There are no existing views of the sites from the Si View Park and Community Center or Three Forks Natural Area near downtown North Bend. (Recreational use data is not available from Seattle Public Utilities.)

11.1.1.4 City of North Bend

The City of North Bend manages parks within the city limits and cooperates with other agencies on regional recreational resources. The Snoqualmie Point Scenic Overlook, a new park located southwest of Exit 31 below Rattlesnake Mountain, provides panoramic views of the Upper Snoqualmie Valley that encompasses the Upper and Lower Sites. Other City parks do not provide views of the Upper or Lower Sites. The City does not maintain records of recreation use at these facilities.

11.1.1.5 Private Recreation Facilities

Several private recreation facilities are in the vicinity of the proposed project. Valley Camp, a Lutheran camp and retreat center, is about 1/2 mile north of the Upper Site on Lake Dorothy Road near the intersection with 496th Avenue SE, south of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River. The camp serves about 2,500 people annually for camping, picnicking, and hiking as a retreat center. Camp Waskowitz southwest of Exit 34 on the South Fork Snoqualmie River, is used by the Highline School District for outdoor education and group activities.

Goldmyer Hot Springs is a private hot springs resort beyond the end of USFS Road 56 at the confluence of Middle Fork Snoqualmie River and Burntboot Creek. Mount Si Golf Course, an 18-hole course, is between North Bend and Snoqualmie off Meadowbrook Road. Cascade Country Club, a 9-hole course, is on 436th Avenue SE south of I-90.

11.1.2 Planned Acquisitions and Improvements

11.1.2.1 WDNR Proposed Acquisitions

WDNR has identified private lands that could be purchased, if available, for conservation and recreation use. These include approximately 250 acres along the southern boundary of the Mount Si NRCA, approximately 1,500 acres along the northern and eastern boundaries of the Mount Si NRCA, and approximately 1,200 acres along the northern, western, and southeastern boundaries of the Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area. No recreational facilities are planned for the identified purchase areas. Views of the project sites will be available from portions of the acquisition areas (see Chapter 12, Aesthetics, Light and Glare, for Uplands and Snoqualmie Point Scenic Overlook viewpoints).

11.1.2.2 Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River Valley: River Corridor Public Use Concept Plan (Phases 1 and 2)

Phase 1 of the Middle Fork River Corridor Public Use Concept Plan, which is being funded by private and public participants and was prepared in 1997, establishes a conceptual use and management framework for recreational facilities within 1 mile of the Snoqualmie River (from the mouth of the Valley to Dingford Creek). The plan would expand on existing informal recreational uses along the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River (accessed by SE Middle Fork Road and SE Lake Dorothy Road), including fishing, kayaking, and hiking. Phase 1 of the plan identifies the existing forest road system on Grouse Ridge as an opportunity for further development of hiking, biking, and equestrian facilities, and establishment of a formal shooting range. Implementation of these plans beyond informal use would be contingent on Weyerhaeuser conveying the land to entities willing to manage the land for these purposes. Phase 2 includes the types, scale, character, location, and number of facilities recommended for formal development or improvement throughout the Middle Fork River Corridor; none are located on either the Upper or Lower Sites (Appendix J).

11.2 Environmental Impacts

11.2.1 Construction Impacts

11.2.1.1 Alternative 1—No Action

Under Alternative 1, no construction activity related to the proposed project would occur. Trees would be harvested on both the Upper and Lower Sites in the future. Compared to the proposed project, indirect impacts on recreation from tree harvesting would be similar to those anticipated from land clearing prior to mining activity. However, the grading activities (removal of the top 1 foot of topsoil prior to mining

operation) that would occur after clearing under the proposed Action Alternatives (2, 3, and 4) would not occur under Alternative 1. Therefore, no further visual impacts to recreational resources in the project area would occur (see Chapter 12, Aesthetics, Light and Glare).

11.2.1.2 Alternative 2–Lower and Upper Sites Mining (Including Limited Lower Site Mining)

The phased clearing and construction of processing facilities related to mining generally results in changes in aesthetics and increased levels of noise, dust, and truck traffic. Construction noise impacts on rural properties are exempt from the King County Maximum Permissible Noise Levels during daytime hours. Construction activities under Alternative 2 would not exceed County standards during evening hours or change current background noise levels. Meteorological conditions would periodically disperse noise upward, affecting higher elevation recreation areas (see Chapter 5, Noise).

Fugitive dust impacts during construction would tend to be of short duration during dry, windy periods and occasionally be a nuisance, but would not pose a health hazard (see Chapter 4, Air Quality). Construction traffic would occur on roads used to access recreation areas in proximity to the sites, although traffic volumes would be far less than during mining operations. Traffic impacts would occur primarily on 468th Avenue SE, Exit 34, and SE Homestead Valley Road and Exit 38 (see Chapter 14, Transportation).

Construction activities would alter existing views from recreation sites in the project area (see Chapter 12, Aesthetics, Light, and Glare). Initial clearing of vegetation on the project site would result in an intensity level similar to those of historical forest practices. Subsequent grading to prepare the Upper and Lower Sites for mining and building processing facilities would cause visual impacts to recreation areas in the vicinity, including:

- Trails to the summits of the Mount Si NRCA, including Haystack Meadow and Little Si
- Trails within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area and Mount Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest (primarily Mount Defiance, Thompson Lake, and McClellan Butte)
- Twin Falls Natural Area
- Granite Lakes, Mount Washington, and Mailbox Peak trails
- High-elevation points in the Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area
- High points along informal trails in the Cedar River Watershed (if accessed by the public)
- Snoqualmie Valley Trail
- Snoqualmie Point Scenic Overlook

The degree to which overall recreational experiences would be affected by changes in aesthetics during construction would vary from individual to individual, depending on the expectations, intended activities, and perceptions of each individual. Thus, the degree of impact to recreation areas and users due to changes in aesthetics outside of the boundaries of the recreation area is subjective and cannot be conclusive in nature. Overall, visual impacts during construction under Alternative 2 would cause recreation impacts to some users. Changes in views of the Upper Site would be more prominent because there is less existing development in the surrounding area.

11.2.1.3 Alternative 3—Lower and Upper Sites Mining (Including Limited Lower Site Mining)

Under Alternative 3, conditions during clearing of the sites would be the same as under Alternative 2. However, the potential noise, dust, traffic, and visual impacts associated with site preparation and construction of the aggregate processing facility would occur on the Upper Site. Traffic impacts would occur primarily on 468th Avenue SE, Exit 34, SE Homestead Valley Road, and Exit 38. Pedestrian and bicycle traffic on Homestead Valley Road, 468th Avenue SE, and SE 146th Street and vehicle traffic accessing Olallie State Park would periodically be affected by construction traffic.

11.2.1.4 Alternative 4—Upper Site Mining - Exit 38

Under Alternative 4, no construction impacts would occur on the Lower Site, and overall impacts to recreation areas in the area during construction would be reduced. The nature of construction impacts on the Upper Site would be similar to those under Alternative 2. However, the magnitude of indirect construction impacts would be less than under Alternative 2. Noise resulting from construction activities under Alternative 4 would be minor (see Chapter 5, Noise). No air quality impacts would occur at the Lower Site (see Chapter 4, Air Quality). Traffic impacts during construction would be similar to those described for the Upper Site area under Alternative 3, affecting pedestrian and bicycle traffic primarily on SE Homestead Valley Road and Exit 38 and recreation users at Olallie State Park. Visual impacts would be similar in nature to Alternatives 2 and 3, but would occur only at recreation sites with views of the Upper Site.

11.2.2 Operation Impacts

11.2.2.1 Alternative 1—No Action

Under Alternative 1, no sand and gravel mining would occur. The potential for unauthorized public recreational use of the Upper and Lower Sites would continue. Harvesting of trees on both the Lower and Upper Sites may continue and would generate noise, dust, and traffic. Timber harvesting would occur over a shorter period of time than

proposed mining, and overall impacts from harvesting activities would be less intense. Tree harvesting would alter the existing view of the sites from higher-elevation areas, but less so than under the Proposal. Alternative 1 would not affect the opportunity to develop the improvements identified for the sites in the *Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River Valley: River Corridor Public Use Concept Plan*. Implementing the Plan would require land owner approval or purchase of such rights by the public.

11.2.2.2 Alternative 2–Lower and Upper Sites Mining (Including Limited Lower Site Mining)

The primary impacts that would result from Alternative 2 on existing recreational facilities can be categorized as either direct or indirect impacts. Direct impacts generally relate to the direct loss of recreational facilities, the creation of new recreational facilities, and the potential to increase demand for existing recreational facilities. Indirect recreational impacts generally relate to increased levels of noise, dust, and traffic volumes; visual change as perceived from offsite recreational areas; and potential impacts to the overall character of the area.

Direct Impacts

The existing status of onsite recreational use and amenities would not change under Alternative 2. Access roads to the project site would remain gated. When proposed mining activities are completed, the sites would be donated to WDNR as permanent public forest. No direct loss of any formal recreational facilities would occur under proposed mining and processing activities.

Persons employed on the sites could increase the demand for recreational facilities in the area, particularly after work or during lunch hours. However, this increased demand would be relatively small, and impacts on recreational facilities are not anticipated to be significant.

Proposed mining and processing activities on both the Upper and Lower Sites would not directly affect any of the acquisitions planned by WDNR or improvements identified in the *Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River Valley: River Corridor Public Use Concept Plan* outside of the proposal site. Improvements suggested in the plan for Grouse Ridge would not occur during the mining operation.

Indirect Impacts

Alternative 2 would not cause significant impacts to air quality that would affect recreational uses. The project's noise levels, in combination with existing background noise, would not exceed King County Noise Code Standards, including nighttime standards (see Chapter 5, Noise), except under worst-case meteorological conditions. These potentially infrequent exceedances would not significantly impact recreational uses.

Proposed mining activity would increase truck traffic in the immediate vicinity of the Lower Site. The primary increases in traffic would occur along a portion of 468th Avenue SE, the commercial area near the intersection of 468th Avenue SE and I-90 (Exit 34), and at the on- and off-ramps to I-90 at Exit 34. The increased truck traffic could increase delays to persons traveling to recreational facilities in the vicinity. Traffic conditions under Alternative 2 would affect bicycle and pedestrian activity on 468th Avenue SE and SE 146th Street. Recreational user access to the Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area and Mount Si Natural Resource Conservation Area (at Exit 32) would not be affected by the proposed project. No significant increase in truck traffic on Homestead Valley Road in the vicinity of Olallie State Park or in the vicinity of Twin Falls Natural Area (at Exit 34) would result under Alternative 2 (see Chapter 14, Transportation).

Proposed berming, vegetated buffers, and concealment of the conveyor at and between the Upper and Lower Sites would help to mitigate visual impacts from lower elevation recreational areas, such as the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River recreation sites, Olallie State Park, and Twin Falls Natural Area (see Chapter 12, Aesthetics, Light, and Glare). Affected views to the sites from recreational areas would primarily occur from higher-elevation areas that have panoramic views, including the sites as listed under Construction Impacts, Alternative 2, above.

The view of the Upper and Lower Sites from these higher-elevation areas would be changed from existing conditions, particularly from Mount Si, Mount Washington, Mailbox Peak, and Rattlesnake Mountain (including planned Rattlesnake Mountain expansion areas). From many of these higher-elevation areas, including Mount Si, the exposed floor and sidewalls of the proposed mining areas, as well as the proposed processing facilities on the Lower Site, would still be visible (see Chapter 12, Aesthetics, Light, and Glare, for a visual representation of the view of the sites from Mount Si). Views of exposed mining areas and processing facilities could detract from the existing overall character of the panoramic views. Proposed phased reclamation would limit the amount of mining area exposed at any one time. However, if all proposed measures to minimize visual impacts are implemented, exposed mining areas and processing areas would still be visible from higher elevations. Recreational use data is not available for all recreation sites in the vicinity of the proposal, so the total number of recreational users affected by aesthetics cannot be accurately determined.

The degree to which overall recreational experiences are affected by changes in aesthetics would vary from individual to individual, as discussed under Construction Impacts.

11.2.2.3 Alternative 3—Lower and Upper Sites Mining (Including Limited Lower Site Mining)

Demand for recreational facilities in the area from employees of the mining operation would be similar to Alternative 2. Alternative 3 would

not directly impact any of the acquisitions planned by WDNR or recreation sites planned in the *Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River Valley: River Corridor Public Use Concept Plan* outside of the proposal site. Improvements suggested in the plan for Grouse Ridge would not occur during the mining operation. When proposed mining activities are completed, the sites would be donated to WDNR.

Under Alternative 3, indirect recreation impacts from truck traffic in the vicinity of the Lower Site would generally be similar to those for Alternative 2, although the amount of traffic at the Lower Site would be slightly less. For the Upper Site, the additional truck traffic on Homestead Valley Road would increase levels of noise and dust in proximity to Olallie State Park. In addition, increased truck traffic at and around Exit 38 would restrict and conflict with pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle movement on SE Homestead Valley Road, including the entrance to Olallie State Park (see Chapter 14, Transportation). Impacts to offsite recreation uses from visual changes to the sites would be similar to those described for Alternative 2.

11.2.2.4 Alternative 4—Upper Site Mining - Exit 38

Direct recreation impacts on the Upper Site would be similar to those described for Alternative 2. The Lower Site would not be donated to WDNR because mining would not occur there. Indirect recreation impacts from traffic and visual impacts from mining operations associated with the Lower Site would not occur. Indirect traffic and aesthetics impacts from uses on the Upper Site would be the same as those described for the Upper Site under Alternative 3. Increased truck traffic at Exit 38 would conflict with existing pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle movement on SE Homestead Valley Road, particularly at the entrance to Olallie State Park and the two narrow bridges along that roadway (see Chapter 14, Transportation). With no mining or processing at the Lower Site, impacts on offsite recreation uses from visual changes to the sites, particularly from higher elevations, would be less than those under Alternative 2. Visual impacts would occur only at recreation sites with views of the Upper Site, primarily from trails in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and Mount Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest, Mount Washington, Mount Si, and Iron Horse State Park/John Wayne Trail.

11.2.3 Cumulative Impacts

Three mineral extraction sites are located in the area, one adjacent to the proposed Upper Site. Other than this proposed project, no additional extraction activities are proposed in the vicinity or within existing recreation areas. No other sites in the vicinity are identified as mineral resources in the King County Comprehensive Plan, although mining is a permitted use within the Forest zone (see Chapter 9, Land Use).

In general, the project would expand on existing mining activities in the area. Direct recreation cumulative impacts associated with the proposal would not occur. The proposed project is not expected to encourage

additional mining operations in the area (see Chapter 9, Land Use). Therefore, indirect cumulative traffic, air, noise, and aesthetics impacts are not expected to affect recreation sites or activities. Mining uses (including the proposed sites and existing mining sites) would comprise a greater portion of the views from high-altitude recreation areas, and continued timber harvesting could further expose the Upper and Lower Sites to views from recreational areas. Refer to Chapter 12, Aesthetics, Light, and Glare, for discussion of potential cumulative view impacts associated with the proposed project.

11.3 Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures are proposed for Alternatives 2, 3, and 4, as applicable:

- To screen potential views of the sites from recreation areas, naturally vegetated buffers should be retained around the perimeter of both sites as proposed. Chapter 12, Aesthetics, Light, and Glare, further discusses proposed aesthetics mitigation measures.
- Mitigation measures to limit noise impacts are defined in Chapter 5, Noise.
- Traffic mitigation measures are listed in Chapter 14, Transportation.
- Air quality and dust mitigation measures are defined in Chapter 4, Air Quality.

11.4 Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The Proposal would not result in any direct unavoidable adverse impacts on area recreational uses. Chapter 12, Aesthetics, Light, and Glare, and Chapter 14, Transportation, discuss indirect significant unavoidable adverse impacts related to view impacts and traffic on roads that provide access to recreation areas.